



# NEHEMIAH

*pray plan build*

## **Daily Worship Booklet**

Week 13

God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,  
day after day and the people of God were filled with joy!

## Friday - Nehemiah 9:38 - The hearing of God's Word!

The final verse in Nehemiah chapter nine is the first verse in chapter ten in the Hebrew Bible. If the sentence in chapter nine, verse 33, is shocking, verse 38 of chapter nine is wonderful, "Because of all this"; there you have the context of what is going to happen:

- The reading of God's Law from early morning until midday in the presence of all the people on the first day of the seventh month.
- The coming together on the second day of the seventh month of the heads of the fathers' houses of all the Levites under Ezra to study God's Law, and then to lead the people in doing what God had commanded regarding the keeping of the Festival of Booths.
- The reading of the Book of the Law of God day by day, from the first day to the last day, throughout the Festival.
- The gathering of all the people in an assembly on the twenty-fourth day of the month when they stood in sackcloth, having fasted and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers, and listened to the book of the Law of the Lord their God being read for a quarter of the day, and then spending another quarter of the day making confession to and worshipping the Lord their God.

When the people of God give themselves to the hearing of God in this way, God will move in their hearts to make an honest appraisal of their lives, resulting in solemn confession of sin and genuine obedience.

Reading and studying these chapters has certainly made me think. I have always had a serious view of the necessity of God's Word in our lives. It has shaped my entire ministry. It is why I insisted as a young minister on the worship of God twice on the Lord's Day in my first charge, even though the average weekly participation in the first few years was in the mid-teens. It is why I have, with joy, invested in leading bible study-only weekly fellowship groups for the past 29 years. It is why I have written notes like these for probably twenty years. This has been done because engagement with God's Word is critical to your life and mine (See John 15:1-11, John 17:17-19, Colossians 3:16). This study has not only increased my conviction about this, but it has also challenged me to think about how I, along with my fellow elders (and I have not talked with them about this yet), can provide more focused seasons of opportunity for you to engage with God's Word.

- Q1. What lay behind the people's decision to make a covenant with God?  
Q2. Do you have a desire for more focused opportunities to hear God's Word?

Produced by the Ottawa RPC to aid the daily worship of God.  
These notes were written by Rev. Dr. Andrew Quigley

**The book of Nehemiah focuses on the work involved in labouring to see  
Christ build his church.**

## Thursday – Nehemiah 9:33-38 – We are slaves!

The honesty that begins in verse 33 and continues into verse 35, leading to the conclusion of verse 36 and the response in verse 38. We will look at verse 36 and the resulting response in a moment, but first, I want to restate that without their honest appraisal of the historical situation, the Levites could not have led the people to respond in the way we shall see they did. We need to be honest about the sins in our own lives, and leaders must be honest about the failures in the church if progress is to be made. Pretending that everything was and is okay is not good enough because without vision people perish, and the first requirement of vision is to understand where you are starting from as a leader; so, such appraising is always needed. So, Levites are not bad-mouthing their predecessor; they are doing a good thing.

It is interesting how they characterize the situation of the people as “slaves”. They are not referring to the period of slavery in Egypt, nor the time of exile in Babylon, but to the current reality. Because of the past refusal to obey the commands of God, those living in the land now are living in bondage to the social and economic whims of the pagan kings ruling in the land, and Nehemiah tells us that they are in “great distress”.

It is the same for us. The civil laws we are living under today did not just suddenly appear on the statute books. They have a historical context, and while I will be careful not to share my ignorance of Canadian history, they will undoubtedly have been impacted by the people of God forsaking God and His commands over the decades. When God’s people, in increasing measure, cease to shed the light of God into a nation, they give the green light to the godless to make laws, which they, in turn, use to rule over us and our livestock as they please. The question is – How can the situation be reversed? Well, as I have been highlighting, it begins with making an honest appraisal, not of the world and its ways - we are good at doing that – but of our ways and the ways of the church. When that has been done seriously in the past, it has inevitably led to a strong desire to change things with God, which has led to God’s people making a covenant with Him. Of all the churches in Canada, we, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, should be acutely aware of this, for the history of this church arises directly out of a Covenant, well, two covenants in 17<sup>th</sup> Century Scotland. Hence, the historical name of the church was the ‘Covenanters’, and the commonly displayed banner is ‘For Christ’s crown and Covenant’.

- Q1. How do the Levites characterize their state as God’s people?  
Q2. What did the people choose to do?

**Correction:** In my notes for Week 12 - Friday, I wrote, “We simply cannot escape the constant exposure these people put themselves under to hearing God’s Word. It was as though they would not let go of God, having confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. (And is not that interesting, given the attitude of psychologists today who are incessant advocates that the ‘sins of the fathers’ are the cause and the reason for the sins of the current generation – ‘it is the home you were brought up in, so it is not your fault, you’re a victim, and you should plead that case hard’).

Subsequently, and with much grace, a member of the congregation raised the point with me that my thinking may be somewhat outdated in that psychologists tend not to lead people to see themselves as victims now because it is now understood that it does not help them and are more prone to ask their clients the question: ‘What will you do?’ I appreciated this correction and wanted to draw your attention to it.

## Monday – Nehemiah 9:16-21 – What astonishing things God did for them!

We are into the history of Israel here, and it is not good reading. The Levites certainly do not mince their words as they address it. Statements like “acted presumptuously”, “stiffened their neck”, “did not obey”, “refused to obey”, “were not mindful of the wonders that you have performed among them”, and “appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt” (Numbers 14:1-5) are mind-boggling. How could they? After just being delivered from slavery in Egypt, how could they have even considered going back, let alone appointing someone to lead them? Moreover, add to that their wanton return to idolatry when they openly tried to worship God through a golden calf fashioned in the likeness of the calves they had seen worshipped in Egypt. (For a more comprehensive commentary on this season in the history of Israel, see Psalm 78.) How do you think Almighty God should have responded?

How did Almighty God respond? Did He turn His wrath upon them and forsake them? Why not? It seems to make little sense that God would be so long-suffering with them. Why was He? And what is even more astonishing is that God was not only so incredibly merciful to them in the face of such blatant rejection and rebellion; look at how He provided for them. During the 40 years, when they wandered in the wilderness because of their sin of disobedience, God led them. (Note – no matter how forgiving God is, there is always a consequence for our sin.) God led them each day (a pillar of cloud) and each night (a pillar of fire); He gave them the Holy Spirit to instruct them; He fed and watered them and ensured their clothes never wore out. If this does not speak to you of God’s character, what will?

- Q1. How did the people of God respond to their deliverance from slavery?  
Q2. How did God deal with them?

## Tuesday – Nehemiah 9:22-31 – God’s great mercies!

God provided for and protected His people as they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Then He took them into the land and gave it to them, region by region, defeating the nations living there.

After all that God had done for them, the deliverance from Egypt, the provision in the wilderness, the defeat of those who owned Canaan, you would think that the people of God would have been living their lives in passionate obedience to Him – but they did not. They did what God told them not to do, and they did not do what God told them to do. They ‘cast God's Law behind them’, you cannot read anything that’s behind you, and the Levites tell us through Nehemiah that they killed the prophets of God. They actually killed the men God had sent to proclaim His Word and warn them about their failure to do as He had commanded them. You could not make this up. And, while I have not been killed, how passionate are we really about obeying the commands God gives us? How much do we truly delight in them?

So, what did God do to them? He stopped protecting them; in fact, He did more: He gave them into the hands of their enemies. What happened to them? They suffered. Why did God do this to these people if He loved them? Because He loved them, God would not let them run in rebellion against them. This speaks to the question many raise today – ‘Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?’ If they are His people, He will not allow them to ‘run free’ into disaster, and such running will always result. As the writer of Hebrews writes concerning God’s dealing with us, “...he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” (Hebrews 12:10,11).

What happened to the people? Well, Nehemiah tells us in verse 27 that they cried out to God who heard them and sent saviours who saved them from their enemies. That was a good ending, so everyone obeyed God after that and was blessed. No. This was a recurring cycle of behaviour. The people rebelled; God would abandon them to their enemies; they would cry out to God for help; He would hear their cries and deliver them, and so it would go on. Nehemiah tells us in verse 28 that God delivered them “many” times according to His mercies. In verse 30, we read that God “bore with them” and “warned them” by the Holy Spirit through His prophets for many years. “Yet they would not give ear.” (see 2 Chronicles 36:14-21). Nevertheless, God did not destroy or forsake them. He could have. He could have wiped them out and started again, but He did not. This is nothing less than incredible. The remarkable thing is that we receive that same mercy every day.

Q1. What did Israel do in response to God’s provision for them?

Q2. How did God respond?

## Wednesday – Nehemiah 9:32-33 – A shocking sentence!

Having established God's greatness, revealed in the manifestation of His power in Creation, the Levites now bring God's greatness to the forefront of the people’s minds once again, having just spelt out His phenomenal nature of character through His dealings with His relentlessly rebellious people. God is “the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love”.

Now, note how the Levites refer to God as “our God.” This transcendent Almighty God is the God of these people, and peculiarly so in the Old Testament. And whose God is He today? He is our God. “The great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love” is your God, and He is my God. How? By His electing love that chose us in His beloved Son before the foundation of the earth, and then redeeming us through the atoning, wrath bearing sacrifice of that same Beloved Son, our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary two thousand years ago. *Please stop and take a moment to thank God for being your God.*

Why do you think in verse 32 the Levites say to the people, “let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us.... since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day”? What are they getting at when saying this? I am going to leave you to think about that one.

Verse 33 is a shocking sentence. Shocking for its honesty in how it characterizes the dealings of the people with God – “wicked” is the word that is used. Wonderfully shocking for how it states God’s dealings with His people – “Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us”. Such honesty is woefully absent in the church today; she is not the better for it. There is a palatable fear of mentioning anything that might offend, and the consequence is a silencing of biblical preaching. The challenge for you and me is that we can hear biblical preaching and yet very adeptly silence the hearing of it in our hearts and minds. We do it because we do not want to listen to it. It is too close to our sin, just too close. The tremendous danger is that we increasingly expose ourselves to ever-increasing wickedness as we do that. For wickedness does not just spring up one day and grab us; it begins quietly and progresses, as James says – “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin...” (James 1:14-15). What are we to do? “be doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22). “...Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you...” (James 4:7,8).

Q1. Whose God is God?

Q2. Where does wickedness begin?